CHAPTER 1
Who Are Newcomers?

After reading this chapter, readers should be able to

- Understand immigration trends and policies that affected those trends;
- Identify characteristics that contribute to the heterogeneity of newcomers and begin to see how these characteristics can inform program design, instruction, and family engagement strategies;
- Support the cultural and linguistic assets of newcomers and help educators begin to support these assets in the classroom;
- Develop and implement professional learning activities to help educators and other school staff learn about newcomers and their families' needs; and
- Continue learning about newcomers and their families through an annotated bibliography of resources.

Newcomers to the United States are a highly heterogeneous group with different needs. While some newcomers adjust to life in the United States with relative ease, other newcomers encounter significant hurdles. In addition to sometimes facing challenges in adjusting to a new life in America, newcomer students and their families are also learning how to adjust to an education system and language that typically differs from their prior experiences. This chapter of the toolkit discusses immigration, the diverse backgrounds of newcomers, the assets they bring, and ways schools can leverage these linguistic and cultural assets for the benefit of the school community.

Who Are Newcomers?

As noted in the Introduction, for the purposes of this toolkit, the term *newcomers* refers to K-12 students born outside the United States who have arrived in the country in the last three years and are still learning English. The term *newcomer families* refers to the families or guardians of these students. (See the Introduction for definitions of key terminology discussed in this chapter.) Some newcomers may arrive in the United States voluntarily (e.g., to reunite with families or to work), while others are forced to leave their home countries due to violence or war (e.g., refugees).

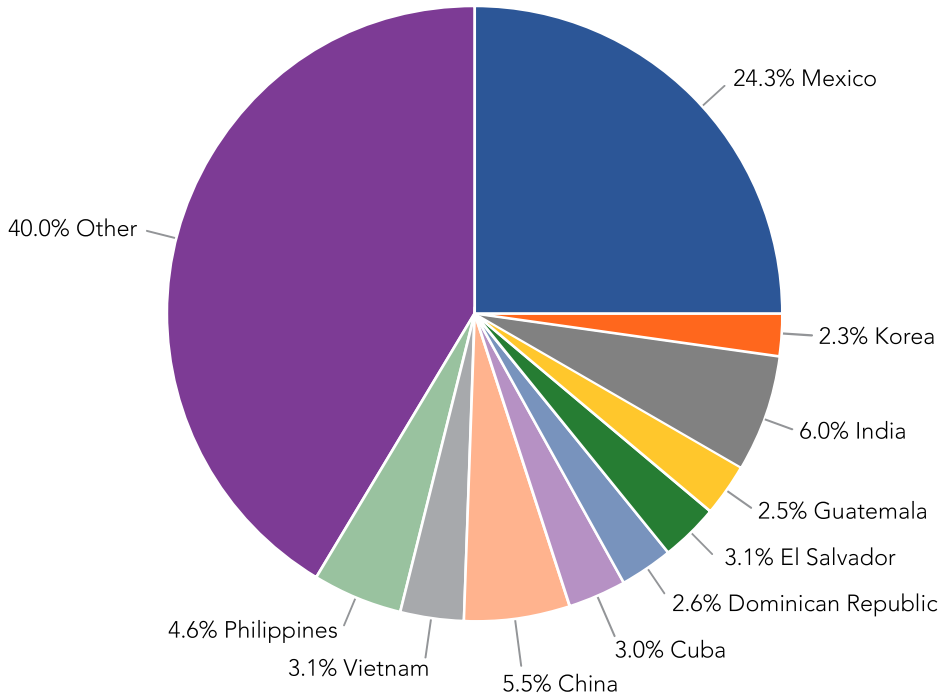
U.S. schools are essential civic institutions for welcoming all types of newcomers to the United States and can be well situated to address and mitigate challenges newcomers face, such as prejudices and xenophobia that lead to hostility and discrimination. School and district leaders have the important responsibility of countering this negativity by ensuring a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for newcomers. One first step toward providing this environment is understanding immigration patterns in our nation as a whole and how those patterns are realized in the local context.

Immigration Today

In 2019, one in seven U.S. residents was born in another country, and immigration growth since 2015 remains relatively stable.[1] In 2019, the country of origin of the largest percentage of immigrants in the United States was Mexico (24 percent); India was the second largest country of origin (6 percent).

[1] Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (2019). U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics.

Figure 1.1. Top 10 Immigrant Origin Countries 2019

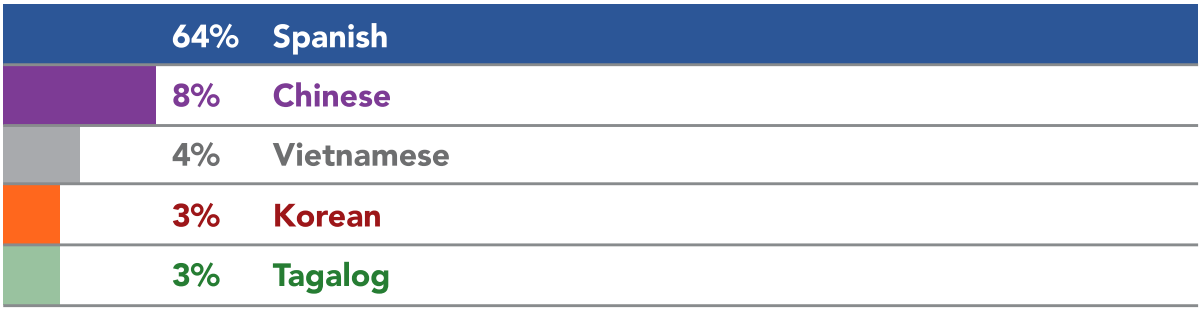


Source: Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (2019). U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics.

The age of immigrants tends to skew older when compared to U.S. native-born persons.[2] For example, 18 percent of the native-born population in 2018 were age 5-17 years, compared to 5 percent of immigrants.[3]

Immigration and English acquisition. According to the American Community Survey, approximately 47 percent of the 44.4 million immigrants age 5 and older were limited English proficient (LEP) in 2018.[4] Immigrants accounted for 81 percent of the country's 25.6 million LEP individuals. Among immigrant LEP individuals, Spanish was the predominant language, with Chinese as the second-most-reported language spoken by students born outside the United States.

Figure 1.2. Top Five Languages Among Limited English Proficient Immigrants (2019)



Source: American Community Survey. (2019). *1-year estimates-public use microdata sample*. Detailed home language. U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau.

[2] Immigrant for the purposes of this data source from the U.S. Census was defined as any person without U.S. citizenship at birth.

[3] American Community Survey. (2019). *1-year estimates-public use microdata sample.* U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau.

[4] The term "Limited English Proficient" on the U.S. Census refers to persons age 5 and older who reported speaking English "not at all," "not well," or "well" on their survey questionnaire. Individuals who reported speaking "only English" or speaking English "very well" are considered proficient in English.

Common reasons for migration. Throughout the late-20th and into the 21st century, some immigrants to the United States have arrived from war-torn or politically unstable countries. Many immigrants arrive in the United States for economic opportunities. Immigrants have also arrived under less dire circumstances. For example, many immigrants have arrived to reunite with family already living and working in the United States or to deploy occupational skills crucial to areas of the American economy, such as in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)-related careers. In fact, U.S. Census data indicate there are more workers born outside the United States who majored in STEM fields than native-born STEM majors.[5]

Refugees. In 2019, 30,000 refugees were resettled in the United States, with the largest group of refugees originating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, followed by Burma (Myanmar), Ukraine, Eritrea, and Afghanistan.[6] The states of Texas, Washington, Ohio, New York, and California resettled more than a quarter of all refugees in 2018. (See Chapter 3 for further information.)

Immigrant Students Today and Their Families

Immigrant families represent a wide variety of experiences, religions, cultural backgrounds, customs, and beliefs.

The maintenance of immigrants' culture and languages offers short- and long-term benefits to immigrants and their communities. Maintaining proficiency in the native language and keeping one's cultural traditions can promote positive academic, social, and emotional outcomes for immigrant students. Any work with immigrant communities should embrace their cultural and linguistic assets to engage and empower families.[7]

Biliteracy development is the fostering of an individual's ability to read and write in two languages, whereas bilingual development is the promotion of high oral proficiency in two languages. To support newcomers becoming bilingual and biliterate, schools can establish and enact a variety of language instruction educational programs (LIEPs), such as dual language immersion programs. (See Chapter 4 for more information on LIEPs.)

Districts can also incentivize the maintenance of the home language and culture. One type of incentive is the Seal of Biliteracy, a state or local recognition on the high school transcript and diploma that recognizes a student who has attained proficiency in English and one or more additional world languages. Schools may also offer courses such as Spanish for heritage language speakers and ensure that heritage language speakers receive academic credit for their bilingualism and biliteracy skills. A heritage language is the language a person regards as their native, home, and/or ancestral language.

It is important to note that refugee students and their families may have different experiences and needs from other newcomer student populations. Refugee students are extremely diverse and possess varied academic, cultural, and social characteristics. One thing they have in common is an event or phenomena that has triggered the need to seek refuge in the United States. Educators should consider the individual characteristics and experiences of refugee students in order to determine the appropriate instructional match and provide the necessary wraparound services. Some refugee students will arrive with English language proficiency skills, while others may not have received prior academic instruction in English. Some refugee students will have strong academic skills in core academic subjects such as math, science, and language arts, while others may have experienced significant interruptions to academic instruction and need remedial foundational skill

[5] American Community Survey. (2019). *1-year estimates-public use microdata sample.* U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau.
[6] Department of Homeland Security. (2019.) *Immigration data and statistics.* https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics
[7] Ambroso, E., Dunn, L., Fox, P. (2021, September). *Research in brief: Engaging and empowering diverse and underserved families in schools.* U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/west/pdf/Family_Engagement_and_Empowerment_Brief_Final_Clean_ADA_Final.pdf

development. Districts and schools can develop detailed student profiles to design appropriate services and supports for refugee students. It's important to understand not only the hardships and challenges that refugee students have faced, but also to leverage the linguistic, academic, and social experiences of refugee students as assets.

How Schools Can Support Newcomers—A Look Ahead at the Toolkit

To support newcomers and their families, the following chapters of the toolkit provide resources for establishing the following:

1. A welcoming environment (Chapter 2)
2. Social and emotional development to be successful in school and beyond (Chapter 3)
3. High-quality programs designed to meet the academic and language development needs of newcomer students (Chapter 4)
4. Family partnerships that encourage and support engagement in education (Chapter 5)

By recognizing these needs and developing strategies to meet them, schools can help newcomers build the necessary foundation to thrive both socially and emotionally and to achieve academic success.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY I

"See Me" – Understanding Newcomers' Experiences, Challenges, and Strengths

Purpose

K–12 school administrators and teacher leaders can use this jigsaw activity in a staff meeting or professional learning community to discuss the experiences, challenges, and strengths of newcomer students; to examine their own assumptions about newcomers; and to identify ways to support such students.[8]

Materials

- Vignettes
- Reading Jigsaw Note-Taker Matrix

Time Required for Activity

- 1 hour

Preparation for Facilitator

- Read Chapter 1 of this toolkit and summarize key information relevant to the educators and the demographics of newcomers in the area.
- Reflect on possible appropriate answers for the questions posed to participants and be prepared to address misconceptions about newcomers that surface during the group discussion. For example, facilitators may want to address the length of time some newcomers may need to acquire academic English and the variables that impact their acquisition (e.g., prior school experiences in the first language, similarities between the first and second language). Facilitators may also need to be prepared to address different cultural expectations regarding family involvement (e.g., in some countries, teachers are seen as experts, and parents are not expected to interact with them on a regular basis). To further solidify your understanding of the demography of newcomers and their instructional needs, please review the resources found at the end of this chapter.
- Make copies of the four Vignettes (one set for each group of four participants) and the Reading Jigsaw Note-Taker Matrix (one for each participant).

Instructions for Facilitator

STEP	ACTION
1	Have participants sit in groups of four per table. This group is known as the base group. Have the participants then count off by 4s (1-2-3-4) to determine which of the four learning groups they will be in.
2	Participants move to their learning groups (all 1s together, all 2s together, etc.). Each person in the first learning group receives a copy of Vignette 1, each person in the second learning group receives a copy of Vignette 2, and so forth. There will be one learning group per vignette. If there are more than 16 participants, consider forming two learning groups per number to create smaller groups in which discussion will be more easily facilitated.
3	Participants read their assigned vignette silently and consider the questions at the bottom of the page. They may underline text or jot notes on the page, if desired.

[8] See Reading Rockets *Jigsaw* to learn more about the about the jigsaw technique as a cooperative learning strategy and to learn more about its research base.

STEP	ACTION
4	Participants discuss the reading and their responses to the questions with others in their learning group.
5	Each participant receives a copy of the Reading Jigsaw Note-Taker Matrix. Within each learning group, participants discuss how they will fill out the cells that correspond to their assigned vignette. Once they reach consensus, each participant fills in his or her copy of the matrix.
6	Participants return to their original base groups. There, they take turns (starting with Vignette 1) briefly summarizing their assigned vignette, the associated questions, and the consensus responses from their learning group, referring to their matrix as needed. As each person speaks, the others in the base group listen and add notes to the empty cells in their copy of the matrix.
7	Facilitate a group discussion by asking the following questions: ■ How were the vignettes similar to things you've seen in our school? How were they different? ■ What new ideas or insights did you gain during this activity? ■ What are the implications for practice? ■ What do you think you might try or do differently in your classroom as a result of this activity? ■ What do you think we as a school might try or do differently?

Vignette #1 Newcomer Profile: **Fathima**

Fathima is a 13-year-old girl who recently arrived from Indonesia. Fathima speaks Indonesian and Arabic at home with her parents and her little brother. Her mother enrolled her in a dual immersion program upon arriving in the United States with the hope that Fathima will be able to improve her English, as well as maintain her Arabic language. Her mother is pleased that the school district offers a dual language program in English and Arabic.

When Fathima is with her two best friends, there is a lot of laughter. Today, the trio of girls is performing a play for their classmates. Fathima speaks rapidly and animatedly in Arabic. The story the girls have written is funny, and their classmates seem captivated by the story the girls have created. When Fathima's character speaks, she interjects English phrases. During the show, Fathima's character exclaims, "No way!" and "Let's go!" and "See you tomorrow!" During the girls' performance, they are expressive and talkative. Their classmates applaud loudly at the conclusion of the performance.

Later in the morning, the teacher is reading with the class. They are reading a version of the Indonesian folktale "Mouse Deer and the Farmer" in English. Throughout the lesson, Fathima adjusts her hijab and seems distracted. As the lesson progresses, Fathima continues to sit quietly, sometimes appearing not to be paying attention. Each time the teacher asks a question of the students, the English-speaking students call out excitedly, sometimes speaking over each other. Fathima remains silent during this time.

As the students leave for lunch, the teacher asks Fathima if she liked the book. She tells the teacher in Arabic that the story reminds her of home. When asked why she did not offer that observation during the lesson, she comments, "I understand the story, but I don't understand the words.""

In your learning group, consider and discuss the following questions:

- What strengths does Fathima bring to the classroom?
- If the teachers were to observe Fathima and her friends only performing their play during this period in the day, what conclusion could they make about Fathima as a student and a member of the classroom community?
- What changes can Fathima's teachers make to the lesson that would provide opportunities for Fathima to be more engaged and to participate in the discussion about the story?

Vignette #2 Newcomer Profile: **Margaret**

Margaret, a 4th-grade student, loves to read and play the piano. Her parents, her two brothers, and she immigrated to the United States from France three months ago. Her mother is a U.S. citizen and speaks English to the children in the home, but French is used by her father and was used at school when they lived in France. In France, Margaret's mother was the head of the human resources department for a successful publishing company. The company recently opened an office in the United States, and Margaret's family decided to leave France and become permanent residents here.

In France, Margaret was popular and outgoing. She did very well in school; her favorite class was math. Margaret played handball, and she also played the piano.

Margaret often draws in the library during recess, and she describes her friends in France and says she misses them. In conversations to her friends back home she says, "They don't play handball here. All of the girls in my class here play on a softball team, but I don't play softball."

Because Margaret had been to the United States a few times to visit Margaret's mother's family prior to their relocation and because her mother is a U.S. citizen, Margaret's mother assumed there would be little difference between her life in France and her life in the United States, but Margaret is finding that this is not the case. First, Margaret says the English they use at home is different from the English the children use at school. "There are a lot of words I don't know, and when I first came, the other kids laughed at my accent. Sometimes I didn't understand them, and sometimes they didn't understand me." Second, Margaret feels left out when it comes to jokes and references to popular culture, as she hasn't seen many of the shows her classmates reference. Third, Margaret was surprised that, even though her favorite subject is math, she did not understand a lot of the math problems she had to do in class and for homework. "The numbers are different! We used kilometers, and here we use miles. And I have to learn about pounds and ounces. They also use periods for decimals, instead of commas!"

In addition to the linguistic and cultural challenges Margaret faces, there are also significant differences in the school schedule in the United States compared to France. In France, children have Wednesdays off and go to school on Saturdays for a half day once a month.

In your learning group, consider and discuss the following questions:

- Although Margaret entered school with English-speaking proficiency, in what ways is Margaret's experience in school similar to that of non-English-speaking immigrants?
- In what ways is it different?
- What structures need to be in place to ensure that Margaret feels comfortable and safe in her new school?
- Although Margaret had formal schooling in France, given the differences between the United States and France, what supports should the school provide to ensure Margaret's academic success, as well?

Vignette #3 Newcomer Profile: **Emilio**

Emilio, a shy boy from Mexico, arrived with his family in the United States a year ago. He is now 12 years old and in the 7th grade; he has missed the past three days of school and has fallen behind on several projects. When asked why he has missed school, he shrugs and says that sometimes he just "can't take it anymore." His math teacher adds that she cannot understand why Emilio has not integrated more with the other students from Mexico, adding, "More than half of our student population is from Mexico."

When Emilio is asked where he is from, he says he is from Oaxaca. "The teachers think that all Mexicans are the same, but I am from Oaxaca, and they make fun of me." The they Emilio refers to are a group of fellow Mexican students who call Emilio and other students from Oaxaca names, such as "indito," referring to the indigenous roots of many Oaxacans. "When I speak Mixteco, they laugh at me and tell me I should go home. In middle school, the kids tell me I am dumb because I don't speak Spanish as well as they do."

While many of Emilio's teachers do not know that this bullying takes place, the ESL teacher acknowledges the struggles that his students from Oaxaca face in school. His ESL teacher says, "Mexico is actually an extremely diverse country, and many students come to the United States not speaking Spanish or have parents who do not speak Spanish. There are racial and linguistic distinctions within Mexican society that we teachers are only now realizing. We used to think of our students as one big group, but that simply is not true."

Emilio says he has learned more Spanish since coming to the United States last year and explains, "When they found out I was from Mexico, they put me in a class for Spanish speakers." Emilio laughs when he adds, "I'm learning two languages now!"

In your learning group, consider and discuss the following questions:

- Because Emilio is from Mexico, certain assumptions were made about him, by students as well as by teachers. What were these assumptions? Why were they made?
- Thinking of your own school and district, what assumptions are sometimes made about particular student populations? What are the consequences of these assumptions?
- What steps can the school take to address the bullying of the Oaxacan students?

Vignette #4 Newcomer Profile: **Yan**

Yan grew up in China, where he attended school regularly, was an excellent student, and enjoyed his childhood and early adolescence. When he was 14, his family moved to New York. Yan had studied some English in school, but like the rest of his family, he knew only a few phrases. His father had been an elementary school teacher in China, but in New York, with extremely limited English skills, he could get only a job as a janitor in a department store.

Yan's father studies English at night and dreams of someday working in a school again. Yan and his family live in Astoria, Queens, where they keep in close contact with the Chinese community. At first, Yan attended a neighborhood high school, but a year later, encouraged by immigrant friends of the family, he transferred to International High School at LaGuardia Community College, where he is a 17-year-old junior.

At home, the family converses in Mandarin Chinese, and Yan and his teenage friends speak Mandarin Chinese with the adults in their circle. Among themselves, they speak both Mandarin Chinese and English.

A warm, open, and energetic young man, Yan has made friends easily. At school he speaks primarily English, except when he talks with other Mandarin Chinese-speaking students who are new to the school. His English has developed rapidly since his arrival, and he can read fairly well in English. He still does not understand everything in his school texts but knows how to persevere and be patient. When he writes in English, he makes errors, but, as he puts it, he feels he has "come a long way." Because he is doing well and he feels that he has a strong enough foundation in English to succeed, Yan has decided to take the test for his high school equivalency diploma (HSED) and help his dad by getting a job rather than staying in school and graduating with his class.

In your learning group, consider and discuss the following questions:

- What strengths and experiences does Yan have that have helped him be a successful student in the United States?
- What are some of the possible outcomes for Yan leaving school with a HSED?
- What advantages might Yan have if he stays in high school and graduates with his class?
- What could the school do to support Yan staying in school?

Reading Jigsaw Note-Taker Matrix

	Fathima	Margaret	Emilio	Yan
List the student's age, grade, and country of origin. At what age did the student immigrate?				
How many similar students do we have in our school? How prepared are we to offer them quality learning opportunities? What do we need to learn to be able to do it?				
Record three key points to keep in mind programmatically from your learning group discussion.				
Record one question you have about the student in your vignette.				

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY II

Monitoring the Progress of Newcomer Students

Purpose

Schools use district-level processes to monitor student progress and, if necessary, design individualized interventions for students who struggle. A common practice to monitor and understand student progress is to shadow a student throughout the instructional day and analyze a student's response to in class scaffolds and supports. This process can be useful when analyzing services for newcomer students.

During shadowing, observers can identify the degree to which the content materials, instructional process strategies, and formative assessment products have been differentiated to provide appropriate accommodations for the newcomer student. Feedback can be provided for instructional staff; additional or alternate resources can be recommended; and accommodations can be highlighted and modeled in order to ensure that newcomer students can access content and demonstrate their learning progress in ways that recognize their language proficiency and affirm their assets, such as using bilingual dictionaries, for example.

Materials

- Shadowing observation protocols
- Shadowing article

Time Required for Activity

- One hour for preparation, 45 minutes per shadowing session, one hour per observation data analysis and next steps.

Preparation for Facilitator

- Gather sample shadowing observation protocols (see below).
- Ask observers to read about shadowing before joining the professional learning session in order to receive an overview of what newcomer shadowing generally entails.
- Decide what focal features of instruction and/or the classroom environment that the observers will focus on. Then design your shadowing protocol. You may consider using one of the ones below or may want to create your own based upon the needs of your school and learners.

Instructions for Facilitator

Prepare for Newcomer Shadowing

1. Form a small team of educators (no more than four) to conduct the shadowing.
2. Review with the observers the purpose and overall process of newcomer shadowing and open the floor to questions.
3. Once everyone is clear on the purpose and process, work with the team to identify students to shadow who are representative of the school's newcomer population. To identify appropriate students, the team will want to consider language proficiency, prior schooling, and other factors, such as newcomers who may have learning disabilities or who are identified as gifted and talented.

4. Notify the families and newcomers that the team will be shadowing newcomer students at the school. Consider sharing the protocol once it is created.
5. As a team, agree on the purpose of the shadowing and create an appropriate observation protocol. For example, if the focus is on access to academic language, the observation protocol might capture the type of academic language used with the newcomer and the type of academic language the newcomer uses in a set time period. Conversely, some teams may choose to use a more open-ended protocol (see Sample Observation Protocol on page 25 of this toolkit).
6. To help the team collect useful data, have them try out the observation protocol using classroom videos recorded at the school. After viewing a short segment of instruction, discuss the types of observations the team noted on the protocol and guide observers to see the difference between descriptive rather than evaluative/inferential statements (e.g., the learner answered three yes/no questions in 40 minutes vs. the learner can't answer higher-order questions). Repeat this process until you are confident the observers are able to use the protocol reliably.
7. Notify teachers of the newcomers when the team will visit and why they are visiting. Stress that the team is not watching the teacher but rather the student. Consider keeping anonymous the identity of the students being shadowed until after the observation to avoid the observation being skewed, however unintentionally, by the teacher.

Conduct Newcomer Shadowing

1. Before the observation, provide student profiles of the selected students to the observers. Profiles should include background information (how many years in the United States, first language, prior educational experiences, and other relevant demographic information).
2. Have the team convene outside the teacher's room at the agreed-upon time and when the team enters the classroom, ask observers to try to sit away from the newcomer to avoid affecting student and teacher behavior.
3. The team records notes on their observation protocol.

Analyze Newcomer Shadowing Data and Next Steps

1. After the observation, provide enough time for the observers to compile and analyze their data to identify trends or patterns while the observation is fresh in their memory.
2. Have the entire observation team meet to share their notes. Identify a process that works for the team to share this data (e.g., the facilitator collects data on poster-size sticky notes using different colored markers to identify different themes; collect positive aspects of the observation; and then move to problematic observations and/or opportunities for improvement).
3. After debriefing, the team should create an action plan to address the issues/themes that were most prevalent in the data.

Sample Observation Protocol

Date:	
Time:	
Student:	

Observations of Student	Observations of Teacher

Resources

The resources below have been selected based on the following criteria:

- Resource produced by a federally funded study or center
- Resource produced by an open access and peer-reviewed journal
- Resource produced by a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (n.d.). *School climate improvement: Resource package*. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/scirp/about

This center offers a variety of resources on different topics related to safe and supportive learning, such as student and family engagement, culturally and linguistically relevant schooling, and how to identify and prevent bullying.

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. (n.d.). *English learner family toolkit.* U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. https://ncela.ed.gov/family-toolkit

This toolkit is a free, online resource with answers to questions newcomer families may have about public schools and education in the U.S. Each chapter has five sections: General Information, Family and Student Rights, Questions to Ask Schools, Tips, and Resources.

Office of English Language Acquisition. (2023). *The biennial report to Congress on the implementation of the* Title III *State Formula Grant Program: School years 2018–2020.* U.S. Department of Education. https://ncela.ed.gov/biennial-reports-on-title-iii-state-formula-grants

This report offers definitions of terms and extensive statistical analyses of the demographic profile, English proficiency, and academic achievement of MLs in school years 2018–2020.